

# *MANIFEST DESTINY - THE USE OF RELIGION TO JUSTIFY COLONIZATION*

A focus on Palestine and Turtle Island

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**Introduction:**

As we watch the brutal images coming out of Gaza in the most recent and deadly escalation of violence by the Israeli government against the Palestinians, we must ask ourselves how this situation has been allowed to occur. There is no world in which mass violence and ethnic cleansing happen by chance or are part of the natural order—they occur due to the consent of the collective consciousness. How, after decades of promises made by the international community of “never again”, has the world come to accept and even support the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians? How do political leaders come to say “I stand with Israel” as Israel carpet bombs schools, hospitals, and refugee camps in Gaza (Al Jazeera, 2023).

This paper will seek to answer the aforementioned questions from both a critical historical and religious perspective. The weaponization of religion to promote white supremacist attitudes, colonization, and ethnic cleansing is not a new phenomenon; it is one that everyone living under Western empire is familiar with. Christian manifest destiny was used to justify the genocide of indigenous peoples living in the Americas, attempting to uproot any residue of indigeneity to replace it with the settler colonial project that is the United States of America. Similarly, Zionist Judaism manifest destiny is being used to justify the ethnic cleaning of the Palestinians and the illegal acquisition of their lands in order to replace Palestine with the settler colonial project of apartheid Israel. In this paper, we will look at the parallels of how Christian manifest destiny was used to justify strategies of settler colonization, and how this mirrors the Zionist Judaic project in Palestine. It is no surprise that the U.S. and Israel support one another fiercely, as they both have similar origin stories.

Ultimately, exploration of these parallels will also shed light on the critical relationship between anti-Zionism and antisemitism, Zionism and Judaism, and the ways in which decolonial movements are demonized and targeted. This analysis is not only meant to expose Zionism as a settler colonial project rooted in ideas of manifest destiny, but to contextualize much of the rhetoric, political support, and propaganda coming out of Israel and the U.S.

### **Methods:**

Using a combination of previous literature on the topic, first hand documentation of settler colonial events, first person accounts on the establishment of Zionism, and the works of both Palestinian and Israeli scholars, we will first explore the following topics:

- What is settler colonization? How does religion come to justify this?
- What is manifest destiny? How does religion come into play here?
- What is genocide and ethnic cleansing?

To show the parallels between Christian manifest destiny and Zionist manifest destiny, we will look both into the archives and into today's media narratives to show how religion is used in both phenomenon to justify the colonization of Indigenous peoples and their collective extermination. After identifying how Zionists took on the language of manifest destiny, we will then explore how both the Zionist and American colonial states came to be due to settler colonization and ethnic cleansing. Lastly, we will uncover the grave implications of the parallels of two mighty colonial powers who target, demonize, and criminalize the decolonial movements that have existed in both these landmarks for centuries. These discussions will also help us to understand the relationship between Zionism and Judaism, and consequently, Anti-Zionism and

antisemitism, and how the conflation of the two is a deliberate project of colonial states to suppress dissent and resistance.

### **Settler Colonization – Destroying the Indigenous to Establish Settler Colonies**

Colonization has taken differently nightmarish forms over the centuries, one of them being the deliberate replacement of indigenous society with a settler colony. Settler colonization is a distinct form of colonization that necessitates the removal of indigenous peoples in order to establish a society made specifically for settlers. There are two dimensions that must exist for settler colonization to occur: a negative dimension characterized by the destruction of indigenous society, and a positive dimension characterized by the erection of a settler colonial society on stolen land (Wolfe, 2006). This is distinct from other manifestations of colonial projects in several characteristics. First, unlike other colonial projects in which the colonial agents are sent back and forth to manipulate and extort the targeted population, settler colonizers come with the intention of permanently staying on the lands of the colonized people to establish their own sovereignty and control (Barker & Lowman, n.d.). Another important distinction of settler colonization is in the way decolonization manifests. In the 1940s, decolonizing efforts were forced into the dominant political sphere, such as Gandhi's rejection of British control of India and Nelson Mandela's resistance of apartheid and colonization of South Africa. In these revolutionary struggles, European powers were forced out of the lands by the original peoples and therefore relinquished control of the land. However, settler colonization necessitates the mass decimation of indigenous peoples, leaving them as minorities when previously they were the majority (Gilio-Whitaker, 2020). Decolonial strategies

and movements therefore looks different when the colonizers are unable to pack up and return to a home county. An important parallel between the settler colonial empires, Israel and the U.S., is in the way they have targeted, spoke about, and demonized decolonial movements among their indigenous populations. Since there is no place to “return” to for the settlers on Turtle Island and Palestine, they hold onto their myths about the God-given rights to the land. Without these myths, they have no claims.

Settler colonization, like all forms of colonization are not one time events that occur, but are processes that builds the structure of the society (Wolfe, 2006). That structure is “characterized by relationships of domination and subjugation that become woven throughout the fabric of society and even becomes disguised as paternalistic benevolence” (Gilio-Whitaker, 2020). The characterization of settler colonial structures as “paternalistic benevolence” becomes a very important framework when discussing the use of religion to justify the violence that ensues.

What colonial structures replaced Turtle Island and the indigenous peoples of the Americas? The United States of America, a highly racialized, military police state that has incarcerated more than 20% of the world’s population, despite comprising 5% of peoples (ACLU, n.d.). The U.S. is characterized by its inequity in every institution: education, incarceration, medicine, housing, and has a long history of the targeting and killing of black, brown, and indigenous peoples. There is no United States without the genocide of indigenous people, the enslavement of black folks, or the systematic and structural targeting of black and brown populations. These characterize the intentions of this settler colony.

Similarly, what colonial structure replaced Palestine? Apartheid Israel. Disturbingly so, Israel has blatant characteristics of South African apartheid structures. Hebron, or Al-Khalil, a city in

occupied Palestine, is one of the most obvious examples. Al-Khalil is almost entirely segregated. Palestinians aren't allowed to walk on the same sidewalks as Israelis, they aren't allowed to travel on the same roads, and are victims of settler violence with impunity. In a small city, their movement is heavily restricted, which include 22 checkpoints and 64 physical barriers of various types, which intentionally work to segregate the Palestinians from the settlers. (B'tselem, 2019). This is but one small example of the structure of apartheid Israel has chosen to erect. In a monumental report, Amnesty International published over 200 pages in 2022 documenting Israeli apartheid and its violating of international law. Just a few of the manifestations of this include: a separate set of laws for Palestinians, the deliberate deprivation of social and political rights of Palestinians, the use of mass incarceration and incarceration without charges or trial as a means of control, the discriminatory allocation of resources, the forcible transfer of Palestinians at the will of the settlers and the government, and so much more (Amnesty International, 2022).

In the instances of the U.S. and Israel, their horrifying origin stories are not one and done: these stories are not finished, and characterize every institution in these settler colonies. To separate colonial states from the injustices they have committed is to deny their own narratives, their own justifications, and their own visions. Ultimately, there can be no Israel or the U.S. without these hideous colonial structures, since both were predicted and built on them.

### **Manifest Destiny: Religion as a Tool for Colonial Expansion**

The term "manifest destiny" is attributed to an editor named John Sullivan who first used the term in his essay "Annexation" on the U.S.' right to acquire Texas, written for the 1845 issue

of *The Democratic Review*. In the same year, he used the term to describe the United States' right to acquire Oregon as a right ordained by God, writing that this "claim is by the right of our manifest destiny to overspread and posses the whole of the continent which Providence [God] has given for the development of the great experiment of liberty." He believed that the manifest destiny of America differed in that of Britain's because it embodied God's law. Therefore, manifest destiny is generally understood to be the idea that the "New Americans" were ordained by God to expand their dominion to spread democracy and capitalism, from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. This term encompasses several core beliefs, including expansionism, nationalism, exceptionalism, and oftentimes the idea of racial superiority (Mountjoy, 2009).

Sullivan did not intend the description or process of manifest destiny to be secular: it was deeply rooted in his beliefs on Christian nationalism. In fact, scholars go to say that his manifestation of Protestant Christian nationalism is itself manifest destiny (Wilsey, 2017). For ideas of manifest destiny to take political and military might, settlers need also to convince each other that the indigenous people they want to remove for their domain are subhuman. And religion is often invoked in these notions.

Christianity, especially that derived from Protestant beliefs, was appropriated and used to propagate and justify the core beliefs of manifest destiny: including expansionism, nationalism, exceptionalism, and racial/religious superiority. Religion has been co-opted for political and national gains, leading to "men who thought they were acting in order to accomplish the will of God...are suddenly seen to have been really acting in order that the genius of a particular nationality should be manifested and fostered" (Kedourie, 2000). Andrew Jackson invoked

racial and religious supremacy in the Second Annual Message to Congress in 1830, saying that the removal of indigenous people from their homes would allow settlers to “place a dense and civilized population in large tracts of the country now occupied by a few savage hunters...it will cause them gradually, under the protection of the Government and through the influence of good counsel, to cast off their savage habits and become an interesting, civilized, and Christian community” (Jackson, 1830). After what is considered an extermination of the Pequot in 1637 in which 300 – 400 Pequot men, women, and children were burned alive, a militia leader wrote, “Thus, the Lord was pleased to smite our Enemies in the hinder Parts and to give us their Land for an Inheritance” (Mason, 1736).

The understanding of the expansion of American empire as a God-given manifest destiny is generally accepted by most people nowadays. It is the intention of this work to expose the Zionist movement as having practiced the same methodology, except rather than drawing on Christian Protestant ideals, it drew upon Judaism.

Theodor Herzl, born in 1860 in Budapest, Hungary, is attributed as the founding father of Zionism. Initially, Zionism began as a political strategy for Jewish self-determination as a sort of Jewish national movement. Of course, this also came at a time in which antisemitism was at an all time high, and European nations systematically targeted Jewish populations within their borders. But, what is Zionism? A definition provided by Israel historian Ilan Pappé captures what Zionism was, and what it has become today. He says,

*“According to the Israeli interpretation Zionism was a national liberation movement with a strong socialist past and more recent liberal tendencies that entered its ancient*



*homeland, derelict and empty since the exile of the Jews in Roman times, waiting to be resettled. [However], according to the Palestinian explanation, Zionism was a colonialist movement that penetrated the Palestinian homeland by force, with the wish to colonize the country and with possible expansionist ambitions to penetrate the heart of the Arab world.” (Pappe, 2008)*

Simultaneously, these definitions are true. Zionism began as a national movement for the safety and protection of Jewish people, but what it became was a settler colonial movement that more valued political power than true protection of Jewish peoples globally (this will be explored later in detail). Although not all settler colonial or colonial movement have religious undertones and undertones of racial supremacy, many of them do, including Zionism.

In what ways has Zionism pulled on Judaism to become a manifest destiny, ordained by God? In many historical reports, Herzl himself was referred to by other Jewish and Christian Zionists as the “messiah”. At the first Zionist Congress, Herzl’s presence was described by a Zionist journalist as “...if the Messiah, the son of David, stood before us” (Mordechai, 1914). What Herzl brought to the table in terms of political imagination to Zionism, David Ben-Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel, brought in political strategy of Zionism. He concretely nationalized Judaism and Zionism in what he called the Million Plan in 1942, which nationalized particular themes of Judaism such as the sacrifice of Isaac and the uplifting of figures like Nimrod (Ohana et. al., 2017). This plan, which was put into effect several years after the establishment of the settler colony of Israel, was a strategy to relocate millions of European Jews into Palestine.

In an incredible first person account of the first Zionist Congress in 1897, a Jewish scholar writes of the transformation he felt around what Zionism was, and what it was clear to become after this conference. He writes:

*“Now that we have seen these same men, the “practical” men of that day, among the delegates at Basle, crowning the new movement [of a Zionist Jewish statehood] with wreaths, and making game of “practical colonization”—as though they had completely forgotten that the responsibility for what has happened to the colonization work lies not on the work itself, but on them, because they carried it on by crooked methods and turned it from its true purpose, in order to create a great popular movement at a single stroke. At Basle, at Jaffa, I sat solitary among my friends, like a mourner at a wedding feast.” (Ha-Am, 1922).*

The co-optation of Judaism by Zionism is best articulated as, “Zionism is an attempt to take a religion, a culture, and condense it into an ethnic identity in a colonialist context.” (Pappe, 2010). And indeed, this is what was done. Careful watch of the rhetoric coming from Israel renders this co-optation clear and pervasive, beginning from the origins of the settler colony to now. For instance, Meron Benvenisti, the Mayor of Jerusalem from 1971 – 78, said, “As a member of a pioneering youth movement, I myself “made the desert bloom” by uprooting the ancient olive trees of al-Bassa to clear the ground for a banana grove, as required by the planned farming principles of my kibbutz, Rosh Haniqra” (Benvenisti, 2002). This rhetoric is common in Israel. One of Israel’s most prominent Rabbis, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, a former Chief Rabbi of Israel and one of the spiritual leaders of the Israeli Knesset, has a long history of using religious language to justify the mass violence and discrimination against Palestinians. At a Passover sermon in 2001, Rabbi Yosef called for the annihilation of the Arabs, saying “It is

forbidden to be merciful to them. You must send missiles to them and annihilate them. They are evil and damnable". He has also said, "The Lord shall return the Arabs' deeds on their own heads, waste their seed and exterminate them" (BBC Middle East, 2001). More examples? There are plenty. Earlier in 2023, Israel's prime minister at the time Ben Gvir said, "My right, my wife's, my children's, to roam the roads of Judea and Samaria are more important than the right of movement of the Arabs" (Bateman, 2023). Notice that he uses a biblical term for the West Bank, invoking the religious superiority of himself over what he considered second class citizens (the Arabs). Israel has mashed Judaism with its political project to maintain a settler colonial state. The blurring of these lines are dangerous and deliberate, and have led to a sort of Zionist Judaic manifest destiny used to justify the extermination of the natives on this side of the world. Just as we critique the use of Christian manifest destiny to do the same, this is no way a critique that is inherent to any religion, not to any people. This is a critique of a deliberate strategy used by empires to convince settlers of their superiority and right to violence, and as a way to crush dissent using religious undertones.

### **Ethnic Cleansing and Elimination as Strategy of Settler Colonization**

The first of the strategies of settler colonization fall under the negative dimension: the removal of indigenous people from the land. The strategies used to do this include: 1) Ethnic cleansing/ genocide 2) The destruction of homes and creation of mass dispossession and 3) The removal of infrastructure, including medical, education, and others.

According to the U.N. Convention of the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, Article 2, genocide consists of two components:

- “*A mental element*: the "intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such"; and
- *A physical element*, which includes the following five acts, enumerated exhaustively:
  - Killing members of the group
  - Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group
  - Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part
  - Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group
  - Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group”

Without question, both the United States and Israel have committed, on mass scale, each and every one of these points, and the evidence is documented. Although we will not prove each point individually in this paper, we will explore, generally, how settler colonial states resort to ethnic cleansing and genocide to accomplish the negative dimension of their projects.

### The Mental Element of Genocide

This is often the most difficult to prove in international court, but one can assume much about the intention of governments/political organizations who do not even bother to hide their atrocities. What has been done to Gaza over the last several decades is a prime example of the true intent of Israel. According to a United Nations report in 2018, Gaza was already unlivable (United Nations, 2018). Before the most recent escalation of violence on October 7, 2023 in Gaza, the picture of life in Gaza was hardly survivable, made that way by the siege on Gaza imposed by Israel in 2007. This illegal siege was made to starve and poison the two million Palestinians, half of which are children, who live in Gaza. The “justification” of keeping food,

clean water, appropriate medical supplies, out of Gaza, was meant to be a response to Hamas' rise to power in Gaza. But what the siege did was create a humanitarian crisis that leaves Palestinian children dying from lack of medical treatment due to the blockade. Before 2023, this is what Gaza looked like: 63% are food insecure or 1.58 million Gazans (World Food Programme, 2023), 82% live in poverty, 95% don't have direct access to clean water (UNRWA, 2023), and 47% are children (Awad, 2022). These statistics are evidence that the might of Israel is not used for targeted strikes, but as a means to dispossess an entire people. This is the textbook definition of collective punishment, with the intention of eliminating the 2 million Palestinians living in Gaza through colonial control of all basic needs for survival. Without a shadow of a doubt, the intention of Israel has been clear. And the same strategies of collective punishment of Israel has been deployed once again, now, in Israel's sixth military offensive on Gaza since 2007.

#### The Physical Element of Genocide

Most of those who picture genocide picture the physical manifestations of collective violence. The mass murder of the indigenous peoples is part of the settler colonial plan. And, as is the argument of this paper, religious discourse is often used to justify collective violence.

The most recent report from Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor to the United Nations documents the ethnic cleansing and mass punishment of the Palestinians since October 7, 2023. These are the most recent numbers between October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023 and December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2023:

- 24,142 Palestinians have been martyred (9420 of which are children)
- 48,901 Palestinians have been injured
- 1, 840,000 Palestinians displaced (that is about 95% of Gaza)

- 81 Palestinian journalists have been martyred
- 214 medical staff have been killed, and 247 have been injured
- 131 health facilities have been targeted by bombs (21 hospitals, 56 clinics, and 51 ambulances)
- 62,840 homes completely destroyed, almost 200,000 partially destroyed
- Just in the month of October, 25,000 tons of explosives have been dropped on Gaza, a tiny strip of land a few miles by a few miles. This is 1.5 times the explosive force of the U.S. dropped bombs on Hiroshima.

Just by looking at the actions of Israel in the last two months, these behaviors are textbook definition of genocide and ethnic cleaning as defined by the United Nations. This doesn't include the 75 years of Zionist violence against the Palestinians, which reveal even more harrowing numbers, stories, and strategies. These human rights violations are heavily documented and readily accessible.

Although it is difficult to know just how many indigenous people lived on Turtle Island before colonizers came to take it, scholars estimate that it was between 43 – 145 million peoples. By 1800, only about 600,000 indigenous peoples' hearts still beat under colonial rule. By 1900, only 237,000 indigenous souls remained on their land. (Smith, 2017). Indigenous people did not disappear by themselves—colonial tactics such as mass murder, land theft, spread of disease, and genocide left just a fraction of the hands that tended this beautiful country for centuries. The resilience of these people, who despite this massive genocide, have grown their communities to approximately 70 million Indigenous peoples in the Western

hemisphere, is a testament to the strength of indigenous peoples worldwide, and offers a glimmer of hope for the millions of Palestinians searching for it.

### **Does Zionism and Apartheid Israel really Protect Jewish People?**

This brings us back to one of the original questions in the paper: how do people come to support genocide, as the one committed by Israel against the Palestinians? The assumption being made when all critique of Israel is considered antisemitic is that it must be “pro-Jewish” to be “pro-Israel”. Sounds convenient as a strategy to silence dissent, no? As a result, those who wish to support the self-determination and national struggles of the Jewish people ultimately support Israel. Now, if supporting Israel truly was a sign of one’s support of Jewish people, then the expectation would be that Israel genuinely targets people who express anti-Jewish rhetoric, not just Palestinians asking for freedom.

Ironically, Israel celebrates, touts, and uplifts people who clearly hold antisemitic views as long as they support the state of Israel. This puts into question if Zionism is really a movement to protect Jewish people. In the most recent March for Israel in D.C. on November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023, organized by the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, U.S. pastor John Hagee was invited to speak. John Hagee is a prominent American pastor and TV evangelist. He is also the founder and chairman of Christians United for Israel. Now, Hagee is also an out-spoken antisemite and has previously said that Hitler was born from “accursed, genocidally murderous half-breed Jews” and that Hitler was sent by God to help Jewish people reach the promised land (Tamkin, 2023). Ironical, given that the March for Israel was supposedly to stand against antisemitism. Is Hagee really an ally of Jewish people, or is he an ally to the

government of Israel and Benjamin Netanyahu? Are the two one in the same? The answer, clearly in these instances, is *no*.

This is not a rare or one off event, either. When Trump chose Steven Bannon as his chief White House strategist in 2016, many organizations condemned the decision due to Bannon's history of antisemitic and white supremacist views through Breitbart News. However, he also held very pro-Israeli and pro-Likud (far right Israeli political group) views. Therefore, the response from the Jewish community was divided on his appointment: whereas groups focused on justice and civil liberties critiqued the decision, he was also invited to speak at the annual gala as an honored guest of the Zionist Organization of America (Marantz, 2016). Apparently, Zionism will still accept you as an antisemite as long as you support Israel.

Another one? Earlier in 2023, U.S. presidential candidate Robert Kennedy Jr repeated racist and antisemitic myths that Covid-19 was planned by Jewish and Chinese people. When he was confronted, he responded by lashing out at other government representatives who critique Israel. Naturally, a few weeks later, he was rewarded with an op-ed in the *Jewish Journal* that was titled, "RFK is an Ally, not an Antisemite", due to his unwavering commitment to Israel.

In conclusion, we continue to see that real and devastating antisemitism is being excused as long as one supports Zionism and the state of Israel. Even apparent pro-Jewish organizations like the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), "have made it clear that one can only go so far in criticizing the actions of the Israeli state before that critique can be dismissed as antisemitism—that some hand-wringing over settler violence in the West Bank is permitted, but that anything beyond that is in the danger zone of [antisemitic] hate speech" (Wolfson, 2023). Therefore, it must mean that Zionism and support for the Israeli government does not have the



true intention of protecting and advocating for Jewish people, and *that pro-Zionist institutions do not work to thwart antisemitism but anti-Israelism*. It seems then that Zionism is not Judaism, and vice versa.

### **Conflation of Antisemitism with Anti-Zionism – Who Loses?**

If Zionism is not Judaism or equivalent to the Jewish people, *then anti-Zionism is NOT antisemitism*. Then why are the two so heavily conflated? This returns us to the main argument of the paper, in that religion is being invoked to maintain and protect the settler colony of Israel.

According to Jewish liberation organization, Jewish Voice for Peace, anti-Zionism is defined as:

*“Being an anti-Zionist means opposing the political ideology of Zionism, which resulted in the expulsion of 750,000 Indigenous Palestinians from their land and homes. It means standing against the creation of a nation-state with exclusive rights for Jews above others on the land. Anti-Zionism supports liberation and justice for the Palestinian people, including their right to return to their homes and land. Anti-Zionists believe in a future where all people on the land live in freedom, safety and equality.*

*Zionism suggests Jews require a supremacist nation state to answer the real question of Jewish safety. We believe that everywhere in the world, Jews belong and should be safe. Real safety does not grow from guns, checkpoints, walls and a police state. True safety is built through forging real solidarity with all those fighting for a more liberated world.”*

The deliberate conflation of anti-Zionism with antisemitism is used to crush any critique of the settler state of Israel under the guise that critique of this state calls for harm against Jewish

people. Even though, overwhelming, the evidence shows us that this is not true. And yet, this insidious conflation has been slowly working its way into the legal system. The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) has defined anti-Zionism as a component of antisemitism by stating that “manifestations [of antisemitism] might include the targeting of the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity”, and this definition has been adopted internationally by states, organizations, and legal frameworks (Wolfson, 2023). In fact, the U.S. State Department has adopted this definition, and expands on it by stating that these antisemitic acts (which conflate antizionism with antisemitism) are criminal. The implications for Palestinians, Jewish people, and all those who stand as Anti-Zionists to resist settler colonization and violence against the Palestinians have faced grave consequences due to this adoption.

This is a clear strategy to silence and criminalize Palestinians who resist the colonization of their lands. These targeted strategies are endless. Personally, I was almost expelled from my previous university for hosting an event on the detention of Palestinian children by Israel (Israel is the only county in the world *that tries children as young as 11 and 12 in military court*) because I was attacked by local Zionists who claimed that the event was antisemitic, despite the fact that I had made and hosted the event with my Jewish comrades. I have known Palestinian students who have had to transfer universities due to the violence that ensues from their Palestinian advocacy, who have gotten rape and death threats from peers on campus due to their activism, and much more. There are notorious websites, which I will not name as not to increase traffic to these deplorable projects, that post pictures, address, emails, and contacts of Palestinian activists with racist and Islamophobic defamatory commentary, claiming these organizers are anti-sematic. These websites are powered by Zionist thought and hatred toward

Palestinians, and have created a world in which being a Palestinian or an advocate can prevent you from landing a job, from getting accepted in colleges/schools/programs, or can even get you killed. These incidents are extensively documented by a legal and civil rights organization called Palestine Legal, but in no ways does it contain all incidents. Most of these attacks go unaddressed by universities and institutions, leaving Palestinians and our allies to fend for ourselves.

This conflation doesn't just create a world in which Palestinians and those standing in solidarity with Palestinians lose, but Jewish communities lose as well. Many anti-Zionist Jewish people are targeted and exiled for speaking out against apartheid Israel. For example, the Anti-Defamation League has targeted the Jewish liberation organization Jewish Voice for Peace for many years, calling them "antisemitic" and saying that, "The spread of JVP's most inflammatory ideas [anti-Zionism] can help give rise to antisemitism". I have organized in solidarity with Jewish communities for over ten years now, and I have heard the harrowing stories of my Jewish allies whose families have isolated them for their views on Israel, who have been called "fake Jews" by their own communities, and many who no longer are welcomed into their synagogues due to being an Anti-Zionist. This detrimental conflation doesn't just harm Palestinians, but isolates, targeted, and delegitimizes the legacy of Jewish people who refuse to accept that a Jewish liberation is predicated on the genocide of the Palestinians, and who say, despite the pushback "not in our name!".

Lastly, the conflation delegitimizes all resistance movements as "terrorist" or "antisemitic". For example, the historic Boycott, Divestment, and sanctions movement – a peaceful boycott movement that seeks to put financial pressure on Israel to end the colonial

violence against Palestinians, modeled after the boycott movements that resisted South African apartheid—is deemed again and again as antisemitic. There are no true basis for these claims, except that they are meant to terrify anyone who wants to learn about Palestinian liberation and decolonization, and to attempt to defame those who stand for collective liberation.

### **Conclusion**

The role of the academic should always be to create a world in which we are all safe, a world in which we reject all manifestations of structural violence, and to create the counter narratives that will liberate us. By providing an extensive look into how Zionism, which began as a Jewish movement for self-determination, became a manifest destiny settler colonial project, I offer a critical historical and religious perspective that can help us understand how mass violence against Palestinians has been legitimized and made palatable to the world. This study is meant to challenge the dominant narratives that are offered up by Western empire, and to use the following questions to interrogate these narratives. Who benefits, when any critique of Israel is considered antisemitic? Who benefits from the criminalization of Palestinian activists in the West? Who benefits when the entire West is too mortified of standing up for Palestine due to the fear of being defamed as antisemitic?

The only goal of any of my work is to bring us, all of us, between all the rivers and all the seas, freedom. Palestine has become the true litmus test to distinguish between those who genuinely believe in collective liberation, and those who tap in and out of justice movements as it benefits them. Palestine has also become the litmus test for who critically engages with the world, and who openly swallows and accept the lies perpetuated by Western colonial settler states whose sole purpose is to maintain the settler colony.

I want all academics to leave this work by asking themselves this final question:

***what would my litmus test on Palestine say about me?***

*“Oppressors are history’s most predictable gaslighters. Be sure to interrogate their narratives with your very soul. Your freedom, and humanity’s, depends on it.” Dr. Jaiya John*

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